

SPEECH OF
HON. THOMAS G. TANCREDO
OF COLORADO
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2004

- Mr. TANCREDO. Mr. Speaker, a friend of mine recently sent me an essay that his granddaughter drafted for her college English composition course on the issue of illegal immigration. I was thoroughly impressed upon reading the article, written by a Ms. Karen Berg--so much so that I have decided to insert it into the **CONGRESSIONAL RECORD** so that other members might be able to review it. I would encourage them all to do so, Mr. Speaker, as it appears to me that this 19-year-old woman has a better grasp of this issue than many people--including opinion leaders on the subject--that I have met.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION--FRIEND OR FOE?

America, since its inception, has been viewed as a land of opportunity for those driven to find freedom from tyrannical rule, as well as those seeking to expand their wealth and influence. Today, little has changed with these motivations but much has changed in regard to the population, infrastructure, and perception regarding the management of U.S. borders. This is a new era, where immigration control needs to be orchestrated more effectively than at any other time in America's history due to diminishing resources, threats of terrorism, and the socio-economic imbalance that can result from unregulated influx. In regard to the later, it is believed that the immense and continuing immigration from Mexico is the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's national identity. Therefore, the question arises; what are the true economic, social, and resultant political impacts of immigration, and in particular the unique issues and problems posed by contemporary Hispanic immigration.

When Vicente Fox was elected Mexican President, he ended the Institutional Revolutionary Party's, or PRI's, seventy-one year monopoly on executive power, thereby elevating hope for economic development (Wall 3). Fox promised Mexicans an employment boost, as well as the eventual opening of the U.S.-Mexican border. However, if employment opportunities increased, then the need for migration would decrease (Wall 3). In 1994, the United States, Canada, and Mexico implemented NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. NAFTA promised hundreds of thousands of new high-wage jobs, an increase in living standards, improved environmental conditions in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, and transformation of Mexico from a poor developing country into a booming new market for U.S. exports (The Mexican Economy, Agriculture and Environment 1). Mexicans were promised that NAFTA would increase trade and investment inflows which would in return create better jobs, raise wages, and lift millions out of poverty (The Mexican Economy, Agriculture and Environment 2). Although NAFTA did stimulate trade, economic growth did not materialize. Fox had promised a 7 percent per year economic growth, but two and a half years after his inauguration, growth averaged less than 1 percent (Faux 2). From there, NAFTA concentrated economic growth along Mexico's northern border by opening factories called maquiladoras, which processed and assembled goods for the booming U.S. consumer market, thereby doubling Mexican employment (Faux 3). But after the U.S. economy slowed down in 2000, employment in maquiladoras decreased (Faux 3). Since then, hope that NAFTA would enable Mexican prosperity had vanished. Therefore, Mexican workers who could not support themselves in Mexico turned to the United States for greater opportunities. Currently, Fox is trying to convince U.S. President, George W. Bush, to "liberalize migration, create guest-worker programs, and provide migrants with civil rights and social benefits" in order to encourage Mexican immigration to the U.S. (Faux 4).

Debate over Mexican illegal immigration to the United States consists of two opposing sides. Supporters of illegal immigration believe it is not fair to prohibit immigrants from entering the United States, since the U.S. was founded by immigrants. Second, illegal immigrants take the low-paying jobs other Americans are not willing to take. They help the American economy because the amount of skilled and unskilled workers created by high levels of immigration contributes to the nation's prosperity (Masci 1). Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve Chairman, states, "As we are creating an ever more complex, sophisticated, accelerating economy, the necessity to have the ability to bring in people from abroad to keep it functioning in the most effective manner increasingly strikes me as [sound] policy" (Masci 1). Greenspan reasons that immigrant's work ethic and motivation make them the cornerstones of America's economic prosperity. Finally, illegal immigrants provide cheap labor to employers, thereby lowering the cost of goods and services.

Opponents of Mexican illegal immigration believe that even though the United States was founded by immigrants, immigration of the past is not the same as it is today. First, Mexican immigrants are not here legally. Second, most Mexicans do not take the dangerous journey across the border to become American citizens, but rather to help provide for their families in Mexico. Also unlike former immigrants, Mexican illegal immigrants are able to remain in contact with their home localities because of the close proximity of the two countries (Huntington 2). Opponents of illegal immigration also believe the United States doesn't need a million illegal immigrants each year to ensure a strong economy. The majority of illegal immigrants are not well educated entrepreneurs, but rather, "poorly educated people who take low-skilled jobs for little money," says Dan Stein, executive director for the Federation for American Immigrant Reform (Masci 1). Illegal immigration opponents also reject the argument that illegal immigrants are willing to do the jobs that most Americans wouldn't do. In parts of the country where there are small amounts of immigrants, low wage jobs are filled by native born residents (Masci 1).

After analyzing the history, causes, and contrasting sides of illegal immigration, one might wonder if Mexican illegal immigration hurts the United States. The conclusion made, from extensive research in specific areas, is Mexican illegal immigration is a detriment to the United States. But, the reasons why illegal immigration hurts the United States still need to be addressed.

First, many discussions of immigration fails to take into account the attitude towards immigration in the sending countries. For example, the Mexican media and political elite portray the United States negatively, and therefore dissention between the two countries in regards to immigration is amplified. Second, manipulation of American politics might occur through Mexican immigrants that become influential in American government. Third, if the United States continues to allow illegal immigrants to take advantage of government provided benefits in states like California, there is a possibility the entire country will have similar economic misfortunes in the future. Finally, since Mexican illegal immigrants have monopolized specific areas of employment, Americans have difficulty pursuing and acquiring those jobs--especially with the prospect of guest-worker programs which would intensify their monopoly.

In Mexico, the media and political elite pay close attention to illegal immigration to the United States, and have created a one-sided, unfavorable portrayal of the United States. The United States' attempts to control their borders are presented as "racist, xenophobic, and anti Mexican" (Wall 1). Mexican citizens even blame the U.S. for the deaths of illegal aliens who die crossing the border, and Mexican politicians have called the U.S. border a "slaughterhouse, or modern Nazi zone" (Wall 1). In Mexico, all political parties support immigration to the United States, amnesty, and government benefits for Mexicans in the United States, regardless of migratory status (Wall 2). Common slogans Mexicans use to justify illegal immigration are: "Mexican illegal aliens are not criminals, they only do the work the gringos won't do," and "they are obliged to cross the border" (Wall 2). Because the Mexican media and political elite portray illegal immigration to the United States in this manner, dissension between the two countries is amplified.

Throughout history, Mexican-Americans had always been viewed as an embarrassment. They were a sign

of Mexico's economic failure, or "exiles who had thrown in the towel" (Castaneda 2). The last president of the PRI, Ernesto Zedillo, declared that, "we will not tolerate foreign forces dictating laws to Mexicans," referring to Mexican immigrants in the United States (Wall 3). However, towards the end of the PRI's reign, Mexican-Americans became a sign of opportunity--an opportunity for the Mexican government to gain influence in the United States over migration policy, and therefore keep the gates open for continued immigration (Wall 3).

After Vicente Fox was elected, he stressed a greater importance associated with Mexican immigration to the United States. His intentions are not only to govern Mexicans resident in the United States, but also American citizens of Mexican ancestry (Wall 3). In essence, Fox intends to manipulate American politics through Mexican immigrants that become influential in the American government. Thereby, naturalized American

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citizens' political power could possibly be diluted, resulting in more favorable immigration and trade regulations for Mexico.

The state of California is already on its way to bankruptcy, and the inability to control illegal immigration is doing more than "some damage" to the state's weakening budget (Coleman 1). More than half of the Mexican undocumented workers do not have taxes withheld from their wages, and are able to take advantage of expensive taxpayer-supported government benefits (Izumi 1). The result of this has escalated economic troubles in California creating a "welfare and healthcare state" benefiting non-Californians (Coleman 1). According to the Auditor General, Mexican illegal immigration costs California taxpayers \$3 billion annually (Izumi 2). This cost estimate includes benefits like education, health-care, social services, and criminal justice.

If the United States allows this situation to propagate to other states, the entire country will likely have similar economic misfortunes as California. Evidence of this is already beginning to show. Harvard Professor George Borjas claims illegal immigration costs American taxpayers \$133 billion annually just in wage depression and job loss (Wooldridge 1).

Mexican illegal immigrants have monopolized jobs that don't require skilled labor--through acceptance of low wages and ethnic camaraderie--preventing unemployed Americans from pursuing and acquiring those jobs. Even though U.S. employers hire illegal immigrants for reduced wages, the average American wage still exceeds the average Mexican wage by a factor of ten--thereby creating an incentive for Mexicans to find jobs in the U.S. ("Wages and Poverty" 1). Also, communities of legal immigrants create immigration networks for illegal immigrants so they can conveniently enter the United States, and find jobs and housing easily ("Illegal Immigration" 1). These combined factors result in a situation where job competition prevents Americans from obtaining jobs that don't require skilled labor.

However, this monopoly could be intensified if the Bush administration follows through with the implementation of guest-worker programs. Under these programs, illegal immigrants would be granted a three-year renewable permit allowing them legal rights to work in the United States (Eccleston 2). Guest-worker programs were proposed in response to Vicente Fox's request for legalizing Mexican immigrants in the United States, and the assumed shortage of unskilled workers--especially in agriculture (Briggs 2). However, Mark Krikorian of The Washington Post, believes guest-worker programs cause severe social and economic problems for the U.S., as well as pose a threat to America's agricultural competitiveness. "By artificially inflating the supply of labor, the government's interference in the labor market keeps wages low, resulting in slowed mechanization, and stagnating productivity in fruit and vegetable production" (1). Two reasons why guest-worker programs intensify the monopoly illegal immigrants have on low paying-employment opportunities are: they increase the amount of illegal immigrants to the United States because many of the participants elect to stay in the U.S., and more illegal immigrants are

encouraged to come in the hope that amnesty programs will be enacted again in the future (Briggs 2).

Throughout time, legal and illegal immigrants have crossed America's border in search of opportunity. Recently, however, Mexican illegal immigrants are migrating to the United States in increasingly larger numbers in order to take advantage of the opportunities America has to offer. The economic, social, and political results of illegal immigration--in particular, the unique issues and problems posed by contemporary Hispanic immigration--are detrimental to the United States. WORKS CITED

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